

# Fishing opportunities recommendations

## North East Atlantic stocks

November 2016

### SUMMARY

The Common Fisheries Policy<sup>1</sup> (CFP) is very clear on the management objectives, provisions and deadlines required to facilitate the responsible exploitation of natural marine resources. However, no breakthrough in ending overfishing has been seen since the entry into force of this framework regulation.

So far, and according to the information reflected in the European Commission communication<sup>2</sup> and an independent scientific study<sup>3</sup> commissioned by Oceana, fishing mortality rates in the NE Atlantic are still clearly above the agreed levels required to meet sustainable objectives. This in turn is threatening the status of the stocks and leading to the under-exploitation of fish resources.

Oceana welcomes many of the proposals made by the EC on fishing limits for next year and considers them suitable to move fishing mortality rates towards sustainable levels. Nevertheless, many other proposals clearly go against the scientific advice; an unacceptable situation that runs counter to CFP commitments and hinders the necessary recovery of the EU fisheries.

The setting of fishing opportunities is the most important EU management tool to guarantee the health of fish stocks and the profitability of the fishing sector. Oceana urges the EU Fisheries Council to recover EU fisheries by setting fishing opportunities for 2017 that are consistent with scientific advice and the objectives of the CFP.

### OCEANA RECOMMENDS

- Setting fishing opportunities for 2017 consistent with scientific advice on the basis of the MSY approach for all possible cases, and, where advice is not available, using the precautionary approach.
- The implementation of the landing obligation should never imply the setting of fishing opportunities above those recommended by scientists.



## STATUS OF FISH STOCKS

The time frame and conditions to phase out overfishing are clearly stated in the CFP. Regrettably, the initial 2015 deadline to restore and maintain fish stocks above sustainable levels, in particular those that can produce MSY, has passed, and sadly only a minority of stocks are known to be exploited accordingly.

Oceana stresses that there is still a significant gap between sustainable fisheries management on paper and the actual management of NE Atlantic fisheries. Considerable efforts and improvements are necessary to reduce the rate of overfishing in order to fully recover fish stocks by 2020, and fulfil the CFP objectives.

### A step back in the recovery trend of NE Atlantic stocks

Over recent years, the status of NE Atlantic fish stocks has shown an overall positive recovery trend. This trend has been the direct result of the reduction in fishing mortality rates towards Fmsy and the narrowing of the gap between scientific advice and adopted catch limits. Nevertheless, there are indicators showing that many fish stocks are still in a problematic state, and that the recent positive trend has not only slowed down, but is now in fact reversing, putting at risk the previous progress. These worrying indicators include:

- More than half of the stocks, 78 out of 153 (51%), are overfished<sup>2</sup>.
- The number of stocks exploited at sustainable levels has not increased during the last year<sup>4</sup>.
- Most of the stocks, 124 out of 153 (81%), are below healthy biomass levels<sup>2</sup>.
- The mean value of fishing mortality rate F/Fmsy has increased recently (see graph below)<sup>4</sup>.

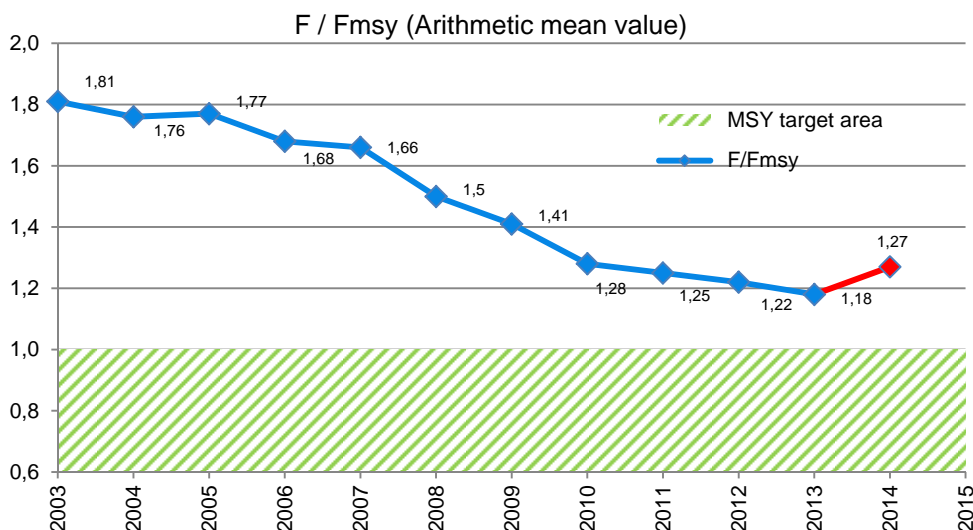
51%

of NE Atlantic stocks are overfished<sup>3</sup>



81%

of NE Atlantic stocks are below healthy levels<sup>3</sup>



Despite the initial deadline set for ending overfishing only a minority of NE Atlantic stocks are known to be fished sustainably, jeopardizing the recovery of the stocks to above healthy levels, a situation that is not only contrary to the legal CFP requirements, but is also putting at risk the status of the stocks and leading to the under-exploitation of fish resources. The potential recovery of the stocks would imply more fish in the sea and a potential and sustainable increase in catches by 29%, from the current 4.83 million tonnes to 6.23 million tonnes<sup>2</sup>.

Since MSY-based scientific advice on fishing opportunities is not available for all currently managed stocks, other approaches such as the precautionary approach or data-limited stock assessments are applied instead. Although Oceana supports the implementation of these approaches, this situation means that there is no guarantee that a significant number of stocks will reach the key MSY CFP objective.

Disregarding the principle of managing fish stocks on the basis of the best available scientific advice, a joint statement<sup>5</sup> by the Council and the Commission was agreed in 2013, to apply a roll-over on catch limits to a list of 21 stocks in the following five years. Despite the fact that this joint statement will be applied, unless the perception of the stock changes significantly, this approach ignores the precautionary and ecosystem approaches as well as the CFP objectives. The truth is that the roll-over rule has been strictly applied for the past three years, even when the scientific advice recommended a reduction in catches for more than half of the stocks, including, in some cases a reduction of up to 60%, as was the case for plaice in Division VIIbc.

*If well managed,  
European catches  
in the NE Atlantic  
could increase by*

**29%**<sup>3</sup>

## OCEANA RECOMMENDS

- Setting fishing opportunities in line with the goal of achieving MSY, MSY assessments or MSY proxies, for all stocks where possible by 2017. As a delay in reaching MSY after 2017 would only be acceptable if this approach implies a large reduction in catches, which would seriously jeopardise the social and economic sustainability of the fleets involved, Member States should in these cases provide:
  - Clear and substantial evidence of the potential serious socio-economic impacts; and
  - A detailed action plan with time frames for when these stocks are expected to achieve MSY.
- For stocks for which advice on MSY levels is not available, fishing opportunities should be set according to the precautionary approach, and if unavailable, according to a data-limited stock assessment.
- Data-limited stock assessments should preferably be used to maintain or reduce fishing opportunities catch levels.
- Roll-over agreements should not be applied if there is a scientific assessment recommending a reduction in catches.





## Compliance with the Common Fisheries Policy

Only 25 NE Atlantic fish stocks (16%) fulfill the legal requirement of a biomass above healthy levels ( $B > B_{msy}$ ) and fishing mortality not subject to overfishing ( $F < F_{msy}$ ). The remaining 128 stocks (84%) are either in a recovery towards these objectives or persist in a state of over-exploitation.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANDING OBLIGATION

The landing obligation is one of the central objectives of the CFP and represents a fundamental shift in the management of EU fisheries. So far, according to the information reflected in the European Commission communication<sup>2</sup> there is little evidence of the proper implementation of the landing obligation.

For the species and/or fisheries affected by this obligation, fishing opportunities have to reflect real catches, rather than just landings. To achieve this, it is necessary to incorporate the estimated potential discards, which is sometimes challenging. In this regard Oceana requests that the Commission and Council improve the transparency of the methodology used to calculate TAC adjustments and other accompanying mechanisms, including the *de minimis* exemptions.

The specific provisions and details for the progressive implementation of the landing obligation are being included in the regional discard plans. Oceana considers it essential to enforce the progressive addition of species and/or fisheries to these discard plans in order to be able to identify potential problems and solutions before the final deadline. Oceana is also concerned about the growing pressure to reduce or eliminate Minimal Conservation Reference Sizes, putting at serious risk the protection of juveniles. This is the wrong way to facilitate the implementation of the landing obligation. There are already a number of provisions, flexibility measures and exemptions (see Art. 15 of the CFP) available to facilitate the landing obligation.

Oceana believes that the final aim of the landing obligation is to reduce the rates of unwanted catches and to support more environmentally friendly and selective fishing practices. However, despite the many initiatives to improve selectivity, the direct application of the discard plans leads to discarding in ports what was previously discarded at sea. The current control system does not guarantee the proper enforcement of the landing obligation provisions.



## OCEANA RECOMMENDS

- TAC adjustments due to the discard ban implementation should never imply a fishing mortality above that recommended by scientists.
- For stocks where the landing obligation is partially covered, the provisions affect certain fisheries but not the fleet as a whole. Oceana recommends that:
  - Uplift should correspond only to the fraction of discards made by the fisheries affected by the landing obligation provisions.
  - Member States should guarantee that uplifts be allocated to the fisheries affected.
- No uplift should be adopted when discards are impossible to quantify and scientists cannot provide estimates based on real catches.
- For stocks affected by a *de minimis* exemption, the percentage of authorised discards should be discounted from the uplift, as these discards will not count against the quota (Art. 15.5 of the CFP). There is a need to confirm that the *de minimis* exemption is being used before extending that measure by another year.
- For species affected by the high survival exception, no uplift should be adopted. Management according to expected landings should continue as discards of these species will continue to be allowed.



## STOCKS MANAGED THROUGH MULTI-ANNUAL PLANS

Oceana considers that it is more feasible to attain the sustainable exploitation of fish resources through a multiannual approach containing a clear roadmap to achieve specific targets. Therefore, Oceana welcomes that, after years of institutional conflict regarding the adoption of Multi Annual Plans (MAPs), new proposals for MAPs are being launched, discussed and adopted.

The scope of the new MAPs, in terms of area, species, content and targets, is potentially more ambitious than the previous efforts. While Oceana recognises that some valuable points have been added to these new plans, we also denounce the fact that the new plans allow the possibility of setting fishing opportunities above MSY levels, without the requirement of having complementary conservation measures implemented at the same time.

Oceana supports the Commission's proposal to apply existing MAPs only when they are consistent with MSY. In cases where existing plans have become incompatible with the CFP (e.g. because an objective less ambitious than MSY is included), the Commission's new proposal will be in line with the MSY, if available.

## OCEANA RECOMMENDS

- Applying MAPs only when they are consistent with the CFP objectives, in particular with the MSY objective.
- Proposing fishing opportunities on the basis of MSY, ignoring current MAP provisions in cases where management objectives are inconsistent with the CFP, or where MAPs are poorly implemented and not providing positive results.



## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy.

<sup>2</sup> COM (2016) 396 final. Consultation on the fishing opportunities for 2017 under the Common Fisheries Policy.

<sup>3</sup> Froese, R. et al. (2016) Exploitation and status of European stocks. World Wide Web electronic publication, [http://eu.oceana.org/sites/default/files/exploitationstatus\\_8nov16\\_2.pdf](http://eu.oceana.org/sites/default/files/exploitationstatus_8nov16_2.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Monitoring the performance of the Common Fisheries Policy (STECF-16-05). 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Joint statement by the Council and the Commission (Council of the European Union Document Doc 5315/13 PECHE 15, 15 January 2013).

## OCEANA TAC PROPOSALS

**Proposals** in **non-shaded** cells refer to weight in **landings** (tonnes) of stocks not affected by the landing obligation provisions.

**Proposals** in **shaded** cells refer to weight in **catches** (tonnes) of stocks affected by the landing obligation provisions. In cases where a catch number could not be estimated, the proposal corresponds to “wanted catch”, to which an uplift (UP) must be added. The uplift should correspond to the fraction of discards which are affected by the landing obligation.

Fishing opportunities marked as “pm” (*pro memoria*) mean that no proposal has been published yet.

Species	Fishing area	2016 TAC	EC proposal 2017	Oceana proposal 2017
Boarfish	EU and int waters of VI, VII, VIII	42637	27288 (-36%)	27288 (-36%)
Herring	IIIa - C fleet	51084 C fleet	pm	19986 (-61%)
Herring	EU and NO waters of IV north of 53°30' N	518242 A fleet	pm	426259 (-18%)
Herring	NO waters south of 62°N		pm	
Herring	IVc, VIId		pm	
Herring	IIIa	6659 D fleet	pm	4661 (-30%)
Herring	IV, VIId and EU waters of IIa – B fleet	13382 B fleet	pm	8020 (-40%)
Herring	VIaS, VIIb, VIIc	1630	1360 (-16%)	0 (-100%)
Herring	VIIa	4575	4127 (-10%)	4127 (-10%)
Herring	VIIe, VIIf	930	930 (0%)	791 (-15%)
Herring	VIIg, VIIh, VIIj, VIIk	15442	14467 (-6%)	14467 (-6%)
Anchovy	IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	10622	10622 (0%)	10622 (0%)
Cod	Skagerrak	4807	pm	4715 (-2%) + UP
Cod	Kattegat	370	370 (0%)	129 (-65%) + UP
Cod	IV, EU waters of IIa, IIIa not covered by Ska-Katt	33651	pm	33012 (-2%) + UP
Cod	Vb, EU and int waters of Vb west 12°00' W, XII, XIV	74	74 (0%)	17 (-77%)
Cod	Via, EU and int waters of Vb East 12°00' W	0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Cod	VIIa	146	pm	0 (-100%)
Cod	VIIb,c,e-k, VIII, IX, X, EU waters CECAF 34.1.1	4565	1447 (-68%)	1447 (-68%)
Cod	VIId	1961	pm	1923 (-2%)
Megrims	EU waters of IIa, IV	2639	2639 (0%)	2638 (0%)
Megrims	EU and int waters of Vb, VI, int waters XII, XIV	5214	5682 (+9%)	4900 (-6%) + UP
Megrims	VII	18254	13099 (-28%)	12472 (-32%)
Megrims	VIIIa,b,d,e	1802	1513 (-16%)	1231 (-32%)

Species	Fishing area	2016 TAC	EC proposal 2017	Oceana proposal 2017
Megrims	VIIIc, IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 43.1.1	1363	1013 (-25%)	1014 (-26%)
Anglerfish	EU waters of IIa, IV	11267	pm	12461 (+11%)
Anglerfish	NO waters of IV	1500	pm	1659 (+11%)
Anglerfish	VI, EU and int waters of Vb, int waters of XII, XIV	6375	pm	7050 (+11%)
Anglerfish	VII	33516	29534 (-12%)	29535 (-12%)
Anglerfish	VIIIabde	8980	7914 (-12%)	7913 (-12%)
Anglerfish	VIIIc, IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	2569	3955 (+54%)	3955 (+54%)
Haddock	IIIa, EU waters of 22-32	3926	pm	1812 (-54%) + UP
Haddock	IV, EU waters of IIa	61933	pm	28588 (-54%) + UP
Haddock	EU and int waters of VIb, XII, XIV	3225	4271 (+32%)	4130 (+28%) + UP
Haddock	EU and int waters of Vb, VIa	6462	pm	2983 (-54%) + UP
Haddock	VIIIb-k, VIII, IX, X, EU waters CECAF 34.1.1	7258	7751 (+7%)	7751 (+7%)
Haddock	VIIa	1654	1728 (+4%)	682 (-59%) + UP
Whiting	IV, EU waters of IIa	13678	pm	9744 (-29%)
Whiting	VI, EU and int waters of Vb, int waters of XII, XIV	213	0 (-100%)	11 <sup>i</sup> (-95%) or 0 (-100%)
Whiting	VIIa	80	80 (0%)	0 (-100%)
Whiting	VIIIb-h, VIIjk	22778	pm	22760 (0%) + UP
Whiting	VIII	2540	2032 (-20%)	1613 (-36%)
Hake	IIIa, EU waters 22-32	2997	3371 (+12%)	3082 (+3%) + UP
Hake	EU waters of IIa, IV	3492	3928 (+12%)	3591 (+3%) + UP
Hake	VI, VII, EU and int waters of Vb, int waters of XII, XIV	61902	63174 (+2%)	63655 (+3%) + UP
Hake	VIIIabde	40393	44808 (+11%)	41537 (+3%) + UP
Hake	VIIIc, IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	10674	7151 (-33%)	6838 (-36%) + UP
Blue whiting	EU and int waters of I-VII, VIIIabde, XII, XIV	291657 not relevant	pm	341239 (+17%)
Blue whiting	VIIIc, IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	29914	pm	34999 (+17%)
Blue whiting	EU waters of II, Iva, V, VI north 56°30'N, VII west 12°W	171006 not relevant	pm	200077 (+17%)
Ling	EU and int waters I, II	36	36 (0%)	36 (0%)

<sup>i</sup> No direct fisheries should occur in West of Scotland (VIa).



Species	Fishing area	2016 TAC	EC proposal 2017	Oceana proposal 2017
Ling	IIIa, EU waters of IIIbcd	87	87 (0%)	60 (-31%)
Ling	EU waters of IV	2912	pm	2014 (-31%)
Ling	EU and int waters of V	33	33 (0%)	33 (0%)
Ling	EU and int waters of VI-X, XII, XIV	16997	pm	11755 (-30%)
Ling	NO waters of IV	1325 Not relevant	pm	916 (-30%)
Nephrops	IIIa, EU waters of 22-32	11001	12715 (+16%)	12715 <sup>ii</sup> (+16%)
Nephrops	VII	23348	21194 (-9%)	19241 <sup>ii</sup> (-18%) + UP
Nephrops	VIIIc	48	0 (-100%)	0 (-100%)
Nephrops	IX, X EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	320	336 (+5%)	336 <sup>ii,iii</sup> (+5%)
Plaice	Skagerrak	11766	pm	9965 (-15%) + UP
Plaice	Kattegat	2347	2523 (+7%)	2065 (-12%)
Plaice	IV, EU waters of IIa, IIIa not covered by Ska-Katt	131714	pm	111558 (-15%) + UP
Plaice	VI, EU and int waters of Vb, int waters of XII, XIV	658	658 (0%)	559 (-15%)
Plaice	VIIa	1098	1098 (0%)	436 (-60%)
Plaice	VIIIbc	74	74 (0%)	30 (-59%)
Plaice	VIIde	12446	10022 (-19%)	10022 (-19%)
Plaice	VIIIfg	420	405 (-4%)	405 (-4%)
Plaice	VIIhjk	135	108 (-20%)	86 (-36%)
Plaice	VIII, IX, X, EU waters CECAF 34.1.1	395	395 (0%)	194 (-51%) + UP
Pollack	VI, EU and int waters of Vb, int waters of XII, XIV	397	397 (0%)	120 (-70%)
Pollack	VII	13495	10801 (-20%)	4080 (-70%)
Pollack	VIIIabde	1482	1186 (-20%)	1050 (-29%)
Pollack	VIIIc	231	231 (0%)	164 (-29%)
Pollack	IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	282	282 (0%)	200 (-29%)
Skates & rays	EU waters of IIa, IV	1313	pm	1050 (-20%)
Skates & rays	EU waters of IIIa	47	pm	38 (-20%)
Skates & rays	EU waters of VIa, VIb, VIIa-c, VIIe-k	8032	pm	6425 (-20%)

<sup>ii</sup> To ensure that the stock is exploited sustainably, management should be implemented at the functional unit level.

<sup>iii</sup> There should be zero catches in functional units 26 and 27.

Species	Fishing area	2016 TAC	EC proposal 2017	Oceana proposal 2017
Skates & rays	EU waters of VIId	966	pm	773 (-20%)
Skates & rays	EU waters VIII, IX	3420	pm	2736 (-20%)
Mackerel	IIIa, IV, EU waters of IIa, IIIb, IIIc, 22-32	216880	pm	190854 (-12%)
Mackerel	VI, VII, VIIIabde, EU and int waters IIa, XII, XIV	406057	pm	357330 (-12%)
Mackerel	VIIIc, IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	40918 not relevant	pm	36008 (-12%)
Mackerel	NO waters of IIa, IVa	14043	pm	12358 (-12%)
Sole	IIIa, EU waters 22-32	391	551 (+41%)	534 (+37%) + UP
Sole	EU waters of IIa, IV	13262	pm	14187 (+7%) + UP
Sole	VI, EU and int waters of Vb, int waters XII, XIV	57	57 (0%)	48 (-15%)
Sole	VIIa	40	0 (-100%)	0 (-100%)
Sole	VIIb, VIIc	42	42 (0%)	30 (-29%)
Sole	VIIId	3258	2355 (-28%)	2257 (-31%) + UP
Sole	VIIe	979	1178 (+20%)	1178 (+20%)
Sole	VIIIf, VIIg	779	785 (+1%)	785 (+1%)
Sole	VIIHjk	382	382 (0%)	223 (-42%)
Sole	VIIIab	3420	3420 (0%)	3107 (-9%)
Sole	VIIIcde, IX, X, EU waters of CECAF 34.1.1	1072	1072 (0%)	905 (-16%)
Piked dogfish	EU waters of IIIa	0	pm	0 (0%)
Piked dogfish	EU waters of IIa, IV	0	pm	0 (0%)
Piked dogfish	EU and int waters I, V-VIII, XII, XIV	270	pm	0 (-100%)
Horse mackerel	EU waters IVb, IVc, VIId	15200	pm	18247 (+20%)
Horse mackerel	EU waters IIa, IVa, VI, VIIa-c, VIIe-k, VIIIabde, EU and int waters Vb, int waters XII, XIV	108868	pm	59730 (-45%)
Horse mackerel	VIIIc	17235	pm	9456 (-45%)
Horse mackerel	IX	68583	73349 (+7%)	73349 (+7%)
Horse mackerel	X, EU waters of CECAF	?	?	1098 (X%)

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